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Prevention of armed conflict: strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution

Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations on mediation

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report describes efforts to strengthen cooperation and partnership between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations to build mediation capacity and deepen strategic and operational partnerships in carrying out mediation efforts. It reviews trends in conflict and mediation and recalls the fundamentals of effective mediation as a background for cooperation efforts. The report describes the evolving mediation experience and capacities of the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations and the cooperation which is assisting that capacity development. It identifies different models of cooperation, stresses the importance of coherence, coordination and complementarity in mediation engagements and recommends further work in several areas to strengthen cooperation for effective mediation.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 68/303, the General Assembly requested that I report to it on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, and on ways to enhance such cooperation. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

2. Resolution 68/303 followed two earlier resolutions on mediation (resolutions 65/283 and 66/291), in which the General Assembly reaffirmed the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution. The present report builds on my two previous reports on mediation — the first in 2009 to the Security Council following its high-level debate on mediation in 2008 (S/2009/189) and the second in 2012 (A/66/811), which included the "Guidance for Effective Mediation", developed at the request of the General Assembly. That corpus of work advanced a shared understanding of mediation and developed a framework for strengthening the norms, institutions, practices, partnerships and resources for more effective mediation for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.

3. I believe in genuine partnerships between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations to build mediation capacity and deepen strategic and operational cooperation in carrying out mediation. Those partnerships must draw upon the resources and the comparative advantages of different organizations, ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities based on comparative advantage and complementarity, and promote the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law in mediation endeavours.

4. On 1 and 2 May 2015, I hosted a retreat in New York with the heads of 18 regional, subregional and other organizations to discuss peace and security issues, including opportunities for cooperation between the United Nations and regional partners in mediation. There was full agreement on the important role that our organizations play in mediation, individually and collectively, and recognition of the momentum in many institutions to further expand capacities for good offices, mediation, peacemaking and conflict resolution. On 4 May 2015, the President of the General Assembly, organized a high-level thematic debate on strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, leading to a political declaration (General Assembly resolution 69/277), underscoring the important role that regional and subregional organizations play in peace and security, development and human rights, and the need to strengthen partnerships between the United Nations and those organizations to promote comparative advantage and complementarity. The Group of Friends of Mediation and in particular its Co-Chairs, Finland and Turkey, continue to promote mediation and it has become a valuable forum for sharing experiences and encouraging adequate and predictable resourcing. I also note the "Mediation in the Mediterranean" initiative and the co-hosting by Spain and Morocco of a meeting on 16 March 2015 on the role of regional organizations in mediation.

5. While preparing the present report, the Department of Political Affairs consulted representatives of 16 regional and subregional organizations in Brussels on 6 and 7 May 2015 at a meeting hosted by the European Union and co-organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the United Nations. In June 2015,

the Department briefed regional groupings of the General Assembly on mediation support activities and sought views on the contours of the present report. In addition, the Academic Advisory Council on Mediation of the Department of Political Affairs was consulted at a meeting in Pretoria on 23 and 24 April 2015. The present report has been prepared bearing in mind the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, which submitted its report to me on 16 June (A/70/95-S/2015/446), and on which I look forward to reporting to the General Assembly shortly. That report underscored a vision of strong and effective partnerships with regional and subregional organizations across the different areas of United Nations engagement in peace and security.

II. Conflict and mediation trends and the imperative of cooperation

6. In my previous report, I noted eight contemporary trends in conflict — the most worrying being that violent conflict was on the increase. Regrettably, that trend has continued. Research shows that in 2014, there were some 40 active armed conflicts, the highest number since 1999 and an increase of 18 per cent over 2013.[1] The seven other trends I noted were the considerable number of low-intensity conflicts; the multiplicity of conflict actors and interests involved, often transcending borders, and the increasing number of substantive issues that need to be addressed by mediators; the diversity of mediation actors; the growing recognition of the constructive role of local "insider" mediators; the demands of civil society actors, such as youth and women groups, to take their rightful place and be heard in political transitions and mediation processes; the emphasis on implementing legal and normative frameworks; and the fact that mediation does not end with the signing of a peace agreement, but continues to be a critical tool in efforts to support compliance with and implementation of agreements.

7. That description of the contemporary conflict and mediation landscape remains valid, but can be augmented by additional insights of particular relevance today.

8. First, research suggests that the regionalization and internationalization of conflict is on the rise, with more conflicts transcending borders and involving struggles with local, national, regional and international elements interwoven in a complex tapestry. External military support — often for the opposing sides of conflicts — risks prolonging conflicts and making them bloodier and more difficult to resolve through negotiations as the number of interested actors increases.[1]

9. Second, we have seen the emergence and ascendancy in some regions of violent extremist groups with a propensity for horrific attacks against civilians. Violent extremists often have maximalist objectives and reject national borders, spreading their assaults across multiple countries and complicating mediation efforts.

10. Third, we are facing an intensification of the phenomenon of the multiplication and fragmentation of conflict actors, both political and military groups. Mediators have to grapple not only with growing numbers, but also with

[1] See Therése Pettersson and Peter Wallensteen, 2015. "Armed conflicts, 1946-2014". *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 52, No. 4.

diverse motives and fluid and ever-changing alliances, and with situations of uncertain command and control. Criminal networks that thrive in the conflict landscape add to the level of complexity.

11. Fourth, several conflicts are characterized by appalling violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including sexual and gender-based violence. Widespread humanitarian suffering is compounded by difficulties in securing humanitarian access. Mediators face dilemmas when the painstaking work required to move parties towards a political resolution has to be balanced with the demand for immediate political outcomes to halt violence.

12. Fifth, we have seen divisions in the international community, including in the Security Council, and among key regional powers. Those divisions hinder the efforts of mediators and can create dynamics that lead parties to conflict to adopt intransigent and inflexible positions, denying mediators genuine unity behind the search for a political solution.

13. Sixth, the cost and complexity of conflict has rightly focused renewed attention on reinforcing good offices and mediation in support of effective conflict prevention. Some of the more successful examples of effective mediation cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, in places such as Guinea, suggest that prevention is an area of potentially fruitful cooperation in the future.

14. Given those trends, the United Nations views effective partnerships with regional and subregional organizations as a central element of effective mediation.[2] The complexity, breadth and importance of the contemporary mediation agenda underscore the need for cooperation from all actors in support of a coherent mediation strategy. In particular, the fragmentation of conflict actors and their multiple lines of command and control, as well as their varying character, suggest that no single organization will be adequately equipped to reach all those involved. The regionalization and internationalization of conflicts points to the need to involve, in one way or another, a wide array of such actors, while having a clear lead mediator and clarity of roles, and seeking effective national partnerships that provide sustainability and greater legitimacy to those efforts.

15. Cooperation starts from a shared understanding that mediation is not a series of ad hoc diplomatic engagements, but, as emphasized in the Guidance, a flexible yet structured undertaking that rests on the consent of the conflicting parties, is ideally conducted by a single lead mediator and has the requisite resourcing, professionalization and political support for a sustained engagement, based on a coherent strategy and flexibility of working practices. The openness of the parties to trying to negotiate a settlement, the acceptance, credibility and support of the mediator, and a regional and international consensus to support the process are the clearest indicators that mediation has prospects of success.

16. Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations to promote more effective mediation must thus address those issues in

[2] It is important to recognize that we tend to use regional and subregional organizations as a shorthand to include other organizations, such as the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation or the Commonwealth, whose membership is not defined by geographic regions. The picture becomes further nuanced by organizations such as the European Union which are particularly active in mediation initiatives beyond their region.

particular. When mediation processes have a clear and competent lead and when third parties are cooperating, based on comparative advantage in support of a common strategy, mediation can be the most effective, least intrusive and cheapest form of conflict prevention, management and resolution. Conversely, if cooperation and coordination based on comparative advantage and a coherent conflict resolution strategy are absent, or if mediators are ill-suited to the task, or lack the necessary professional support, conflict actors often play mediators off against one another and engage in forum shopping, and third-party engagement adds to the confusion of the situation and the suffering of those affected.

III. Institutional experience and capacities for mediation

17. It is useful, therefore, to note the experiences of the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in mediation activities and in developing mediation capacities, before turning to how cooperation has developed among them.

18. Special Representatives and Envoys have been deployed for many decades to carry out good offices and mediation, either at the initiative of the Secretary-General, or at the request of the parties, or in fulfilment of a request by the General Assembly or a mandate from the Security Council. Today, the Department of Political Affairs plays a central role in United Nations efforts to prevent and resolve conflict. United Nations missions in Africa, West Asia and Europe, including envoys based outside conflict zones but regularly visiting them and special representatives of the Secretary-General heading special political missions or peacekeeping operations in the field, are able to focus on behalf of the Secretary-General on specific conflicts and lead or support mediation or facilitation processes as diverse as those on Afghanistan, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo/Great Lakes region, Georgia, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Western Sahara, Yemen, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and others. The regional political offices of the Department of Political Affairs — the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia — and presences in other locations operate as "forward platforms" for preventive diplomacy and mediation. They are mandated to promote cooperation and partnership with regional and subregional organizations in their areas of responsibility and often reinforce the work of those organizations or engage hand in hand with them. In addition to working closely with the African Union, the mandate of the United Nations Office to the African Union was expanded in April 2013 to include good offices in Southern and Eastern Africa. In non-mission settings, at the request of national authorities, Resident Coordinators with the support of the Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and often assisted by peace and development advisers, are engaged in support of national initiatives towards conflict resolution.

19. The Department of Political Affairs has continued to function as a focal point for the United Nations on mediation, providing support to mediation initiatives and promoting greater integration and coordination with other mediation actors, including Member States, regional and subregional organizations and relevant non-governmental partners. Since its inception in 2006, the Mediation Support Unit of the Department of Political Affairs fulfils this role through a combination of its staff and the mediation professionals who constitute the standby team of senior

mediation advisers, a rapid response mechanism whereby experts can be deployed to the field within 72 hours to provide technical advice to United Nations officials and others — often regional and subregional organizations — engaged in mediation and conflict prevention efforts. In addition, the unit manages a roster of experts and has developed networks with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics and organizations working on mediation with religious and tribal actors.

20. Regional and subregional organizations have increasingly been engaged in, and have developed capacities for, mediation. On the African continent, the African Union and subregional organizations have responsibilities, through their constitutive acts and protocols, to prevent and address conflict, including through peaceful means, and have developed normative policies, legal instruments and mechanisms to engage at the various stages of conflict. The African Union has further developed its peace and security architecture and its Panel of the Wise continues to be a pillar of the efforts of the organization in conflict prevention. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been operationalizing its mediation and facilitation division and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has established a mediation support unit and a mediation reference group consisting of members from all SADC member States. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) established its mediation support unit in 2012, as well as a roster of mediators from the region.

21. In Europe, the European Union and OSCE have developed institutional structures dedicated to mediation support. The European Union Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Division is situated within the European External Action Service; at OSCE, the mediation support capacity is part of the Conflict Prevention Centre in the secretariat. Those institutional developments are the outcome of assessments, as a result of which it was concluded that dedicated in-house mediation support capacities were necessary for the work of the two organizations. The launch in May 2014 of the European Institute of Peace, an independent partner of the European Union, provided a further impetus to European efforts to promote mediation and dialogue.

22. The Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) has made positive strides in developing the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation which will enhance its mediation, preventative diplomacy and conflict resolution efforts. The Organization of American States (OAS) has continued to strengthen its mediation capabilities by enhancing the Department for Sustainable Democracy and Special Missions of its secretariat. The establishment of a peace, security and mediation unit has been important in institutionalizing mediation capacity at OIC, while the League of Arab States (LAS) is considering setting up a mediation support unit, reinforcing its recently established early warning and crisis management centre.

IV. Cooperation frameworks

23. As regional and subregional organizations develop institutional capacities and expand their involvement in mediation, expert meetings of regional and subregional organizations and the United Nations have been convened since 2010, to strengthen cooperation and knowledge-sharing with the United Nations and with each other. Those meetings have been hosted by OSCE (2010), OIC (2012), LAS (2014) and the European Union (2015).

24. In addition to the regional offices of the Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations has set up a network of liaison presences for key regional partners to strengthen working relationships, with the African Union in Addis Ababa, with SADC in Gaborone and as liaison with the European Union in Brussels. It has also recently deployed a Partnership Officer in Bangkok and a Liaison Officer to ASEAN in Jakarta.

25. Formal partnership agreements and joint workplans have provided the frameworks for day-to-day collaboration, including the sharing of best practices. The United Nations cooperation with the African Union is probably the most developed and broad, as defined in the 2006 declaration on enhancing United Nation-African Union cooperation, which set out the framework for a 10-year capacity-building programme for the African Union. Part of that framework concerns United Nations-African Union cooperation in mediation, stressing in particular the partnership at the institutional and operational levels. Institutionally, it has entailed reinforcing the mediation capacity of the African Union Commission; the establishment of a secretariat and work programme for the Panel of the Wise; a roster of African mediation experts; a knowledge management system for documenting African Union mediation experiences and practices; and "lessons learned" exercises and case studies.

26. Since the establishment of the United Nations Office to the African Union in 2010, the mediation partnership has evolved further. In 2014, the United Nations and the African Union adopted a joint United Nations-African Union framework for an enhanced partnership in peace and security. Building on the 10-year capacity-building programme, the framework provides a solid institutional road map for the two organizations to build an effective strategic and operational partnership, as the African Union continues to develop its African peace and security architecture.

27. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) signed a memorandum of understanding with UNOCA in 2012, which included an agreement to strengthen cooperation in mediation. In other cases, a working-level relationship with a regional or subregional organization, such as with ECOWAS, may lead to the implementation of specific activities without a need to formalize the relationship.

28. With ASEAN, LAS, SADC and OAS, for example, the partnership is based on a broad cooperation framework to strengthen capacity and operational collaboration, within which certain activities are undertaken in the area of mediation and conflict prevention. The United Nations-ASEAN Comprehensive Partnership, adopted in November 2011, calls for cooperation on political security issues, economic matters, sociocultural affairs and collaboration between the two secretariats. Long-standing cooperation agreements between the United Nations and LAS have provided the basis for the two organizations to address a wide array of democratization and transition issues across the Middle East and North Africa. The cooperation framework agreed between the Department of Political Affairs and SADC in September 2013 focuses specifically on mediation, elections and gender. In December 2013, OAS and the Department of Political Affairs renewed their mediation partnership through the adoption of a two-year work plan.

29. Since 2003, the United Nations and the European Union have maintained a United Nations-European Union steering committee as the core forum for regular senior-level consultation, cooperation and coordination on crisis management. In particular, it focuses on countries and regions where the United Nations has a peace

operation and where there is United Nations-European Union engagement on crisis management issues. The European Union remains a strong advocate and supporter of strengthening the capacity of the United Nations for mediation, including through the provision of significant financial contributions, and there are regular exchanges to promote coherent responses to requests from the field for mediation support and to mitigate risks of duplication. In June 2014, OSCE and the Department of Political Affairs mediation support offices concluded a mediation work plan for sharing information on best practices and collaborating in capacity-building and operational engagement.

V. Cooperation on capacity development

30. Pursuant to the frameworks described above, or on request, the United Nations has actively assisted regional and subregional organizations to develop their overall organizational mediation and conflict prevention capabilities. That has included providing support for assessing the necessary institutional arrangements and policy frameworks, facilitating the establishment of the required support structures, or assisting members of the regional organization in formulating their own mediation strategies.

31. Workshops have contributed to deepening the mediation capacity of regional and subregional organizations. When conducted jointly, they have also helped to strengthen partnerships and enhance inter-organizational operational cooperation. In March 2014, for instance, the Department of Political Affairs teamed up with UNDP and OAS to organize a workshop on mediation, facilitation and dialogue for OAS field-based representatives and United Nations Resident Coordinators. In 2014, the Department of Political Affairs also collaborated with IGAD on a mediation course for 28 prospective high-level mediators, including former heads of State, from all IGAD member States. In February 2015, the Department of Political Affairs convened an ASEAN-United Nations regional meeting in Myanmar focusing on areas of potential collaboration in support of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, with a focus on conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. That same month, UNOCA participated in a workshop organized by ECCAS in N'Djamena, elaborating recommendations to strengthen the institutional mediation architecture of ECCAS. In the coming months, the African Union Commission, the United Nations and the European Union are planning to hold a round-table discussion on the creation of mediation support capacity within the African Union Commission.

32. The Department of Political Affairs has provided technical support to the African Union on designing and operating expert rosters on mediation and related thematic issues. It is also working with the United Nations Office to the African Union, and the African Union Departments of Political Affairs and Peace and Security to organize a joint training course on conflict analysis in Addis Ababa for later in 2015. Staff visit programmes have allowed staff members of regional organizations to be placed in the Department of Political Affairs for a limited period of time to learn about how it undertakes mediation support. To date, that has included members of staff from ASEAN, OIC, OSCE and LAS. The Department of Political Affairs has also worked closely with the European Union on the creation of its in-house mediation capacity and has continued to provide support through

targeted training seminars on thematic issues, including gender and inclusive processes.

33. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has provided technical expertise, training and capacity-building support to a range of regional organizations involved in the prevention, mediation and resolution of conflicts over natural resources. In particular, regional training on natural resources, conflict and peacebuilding has been provided for experts of the European Union, the Economic Commission for Europe and OSCE, as well as technical inputs on regional environment and security risks provided to the African Union through the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

34. The United Nations runs a number of training programmes as part of its commitment to professionalize mediation, which include representatives of regional and subregional organizations among the participants. For instance, the Department of Political Affairs runs a high-level course on mediation, with funding from the European Union; a ceasefire mediation and management training course, organized with the Norwegian Defence International Centre and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs; a gender and inclusive mediation seminar, organized jointly with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Finland and Norway, the Crisis Management Initiative and the Peace Research Institute Oslo; and a dialogue and mediation course, developed jointly with the Swedish Folke Bernadotte Academy. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) runs a peacemaking and preventive diplomacy course.

35. United Nations mediation training includes sessions and scenario exercises focused on cooperation with regional and subregional organizations. Staff members, ranging from senior envoys to political and mediation staff, from those organizations are invited to participate in many mediation training sessions organized by the United Nations, enabling not only the development of technical mediation knowledge and skills but also the exchange of experiences and the deepening of relationships across a spectrum of mediation practitioners.

36. Even senior diplomats find that they benefit significantly from additional training in mediation and all institutional mediators need skilled mediation support teams backed by an effective secretariat, including thematic experts. Training activities have helped to build capacity and ensure its availability to mediators from regional and subregional organizations. At the same time, particularly where States in a region lead processes on behalf of organizations, organizational institutional capacity may be less heavily drawn upon than national advisers, who may be close to the mediator.

37. Organizations, including the United Nations, tend to appoint senior mediators with distinguished careers as politicians or diplomats, including, sometimes, former heads of State. Many regional and subregional organizations also draw upon serving heads of State or foreign ministers to lead their mediation efforts. That can provide additional gravitas, access and sometimes much-needed leverage. It can also place intense pressure on a process, as mediators who have heavy government responsibilities may find it difficult to devote sustained attention to moving a difficult mediation forward for a prolonged period of time.

VI. Cooperation on mediation engagements

38. The purpose of the cooperation frameworks and activities described above is to promote coherence, coordination and complementarity, which are among the key fundamentals identified in the Guidance, in the design, conduct and implementation of mediation in the field.

39. As stated in the Guidance: "It is generally preferable to have a lead mediator from a single entity based on a strategic partnership and coordination with other mediating entities." Whenever possible, the choice of the lead mediator should be reached through consultations between the relevant entities, taking into account the context and based on comparative advantage. Importantly, in the Guidance it is noted that "proximity to the parties should be neither dismissed nor taken for granted as an automatic advantage". Sometimes, proximity allows for greater access to parties and heightens credibility; at other times more distance is needed in order to ensure impartiality. The key considerations should rather be "acceptability of the mediating body and the mediator by the conflict parties and the potential effectiveness and quality of the mediation". As further pointed out in the Guidance: "Organizational capacity, capability and available resources should be considered in deciding on the division of labour within the mediation environment."

40. The Guidance states that mediation actors should "work together to agree on the degree of transparency and coordination mechanisms for information sharing." It further states that they should cooperate "based on a common mediation strategy, ensure consistent messaging to the parties and avoid duplication or overloading the parties with multiple competing processes". It is thus the responsibility of those entrusted to lead a mediation to coordinate external actors effectively and the responsibility of those external actors to support the mediation strategy. That can assure the unity of the mediation, which is essential to its success. Where the lead mediation is contested or coordination is absent, the almost inevitable result is forum shopping and a proliferation of competing and confusing initiatives.

41. Determining a lead mediation organization remains context-specific and must take into account that each organization has distinct comparative advantages and limitations, which I described in my report to the Security Council in 2009 (S/2009/189, annex).

42. The United Nations, with its universal membership, impartiality and legitimacy derived from the Charter, provides the most comprehensive dispute resolution system available, including extensive mediation expertise and experience across regions, in both high-profile and quiet good offices initiatives.

43. Regional and subregional organizations have first-hand knowledge of disputes in their area, as well as an understanding of their historical and cultural contexts. Their membership is less extensive than the United Nations, but they can draw upon strong local networks. Their proximity has sometimes increased their willingness and ability to intervene early and their legitimacy in the eyes of conflicting parties. The intention of the regional offices of the Department of Political Affairs is to complement the efforts of national and regional counterparts and strengthen United Nations networks and access to local and regional actors, thereby making the United Nations more connected and responsive to developments on the ground.

44. There are also comparative disadvantages. Divisions in the Security Council can complicate United Nations mediation initiatives. The entanglement of regional and national politics, compounded by the vested interests of neighbouring States and divisions within or between regional organizations, has sometimes complicated regional mediation efforts, or seen mediation roles used as a cover to pursue interests other than those which promote resolution of a conflict.

45. Mechanisms of coordination also vary. Good practice reminds us that lead mediators should, without compromising the confidence of the parties or mediating by committee, establish formal or informal means for consultation and coordination and afford roles as appropriate to other actors. At times, to preserve flexibility, a mediator may hold regular individual meetings with other third-party actors; in other cases, to promote unity and common action, the mediator may form consultative bodies or other ad hoc mechanisms, such as groups of friends or international contact groups. In all cases, the lead mediator should be clear about which actors should be engaged as like-minded supporters of a process and which actors should be engaged because they are in effect parties involved in the conflict, or enjoy particular influence over those who are.

46. Today, we observe several models of leadership and coordination emerging in mediation practice. In some instances, the United Nations is the lead mediator, often mandated by the Security Council in the exercise of its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security under the Charter. For example, in Libya, the United Nations serves as the lead mediator, with relevant regional and subregional organizations remaining closely engaged in support of its efforts.

47. While the United Nations often strives to coordinate with and involve regional and subregional actors, sometimes it holds a different position to that of regional organizations. In the Western Sahara, for instance, the United Nations position is different from that of the African Union. There may be an additional challenge when regional or subregional organizations differ among themselves on how to address conflicts, as has been the case in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau and Madagascar in recent years.

48. A second model involves joint mediation with a single mediator representing the United Nations and a regional organization, as in Darfur and, earlier, in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Guidance cautions against those arrangements in most cases, and indeed the change of lead on the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic is instructive. Mediation efforts were originally led by LAS but as the conflict grew in intensity and scope, joint United Nations-LAS representatives were appointed to mediate. Eventually, and after close consultation, the United Nations assumed the sole lead of the process while remaining closely engaged with LAS.

49. A third model involves mediation groupings or "co-leads". Sometimes the division of roles is very structured. For example, the Geneva International Discussions on the situation in Georgia are co-chaired on an equal basis by the European Union, OSCE and the United Nations. The co-chairs are also responsible for preparing, convening and facilitating the periodic meetings of the incidents prevention and response mechanism, with the United Nations taking the lead in facilitating discussions in one and the OSCE in another. In other cases, roles are less clearly defined, as, for instance, with the Middle East Quartet comprising the United Nations, the European Union, the United States of America and the Russian Federation.

50. A fourth model involves the United Nations playing an important supportive or follow-on role in a mediation where a regional or subregional organization had or has the lead. The United Nations, through my Special Representative for Mali, assisted by the Department of Political Affairs standby team of senior mediation advisers, has been supporting the mediation effort in Mali led by Algeria, which also includes key regional organizations, including the African Union and ECOWAS, as well as other countries in the region. In the Central African Republic in 2015, for instance, the head of UNOCA chaired the Bangui Forum for national reconciliation, working in close cooperation with the mediator appointed by ECCAS. In Yemen in 2011, the United Nations supported the Gulf Cooperation Council in reaching agreement on the implementation mechanism of the Gulf Cooperation Council Agreement, and then took on the role of an implementing partner, drawing on its technical capacity to support the national dialogue in 2013 and facilitate the overall transition efforts.

51. The United Nations has been providing ongoing support to the mediation in South Sudan led by IGAD and the African Union High-level Implementation Panel for Sudan. My Special Envoy and Head of the Office of the Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan continues to play an active role in the mediation processes, including through participation in all rounds of negotiations and the provision of technical advice and support. Similarly, the United Nations has continued to support the facilitation in Lesotho led by SADC during 2014 and 2015.

52. A fifth model, often taking place in parallel with the fourth, is for the United Nations to provide direct technical assistance to a regional or subregional mediator, or a Member State in a region, which is leading a mediation. In 2014 and 2015 alone, the Department of Political Affairs deployed experts from the standby team of senior mediation advisors to provide direct technical support to peace processes facilitated or co-facilitated by regional and subregional organizations in, inter alia, the Central African Republic, Mali, South Sudan, the Sudan and Ukraine. By way of example, the Trilateral Contact Group coordinates the implementation of the peace plan in eastern Ukraine and consists of senior representatives of Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office. OSCE also has a special monitoring mission observing and reporting on the situation. At the request of OSCE, the United Nations has provided ceasefire training for OSCE monitors and high-level coaching for the OSCE Special Representative to the Contact Group and representatives to the Chairmanship.

53. Providing political and/or technical support to mediation processes led by other actors gives the United Nations access to the process and, sometimes, the possibility to exert a positive influence and promote international unity behind a single effort. However, it is not without risk, especially in instances where the process may be ineffective or where its substance may not be what the United Nations would ideally envisage. The United Nations, for instance, can never endorse a peace agreement that provides for amnesties for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes or gross violations of human rights, including conflict-related sexual violence, and it supports the remit of the International Criminal Court. As such, the United Nations may find itself in a difficult position if a peace agreement diverges from the provisions of international law or Security Council resolutions. On the other hand, when the United Nations is not in the lead, its envoys can often play an important bridging role to inform and explain to regional actors and conflicting parties the expectations and positions of the United Nations. Briefings

provided to the Security Council by envoys in the Middle East and several African conflicts have helped to shape the overall environment of the mediation process and lessen potential differences between the lead mediator and the parties, even if the results are imperfect.

54. A particular subset of that dilemma arises when the United Nations is not leading the mediation process, but is managing major operations on the ground in a given country, for example in the Central African Republic, Mali and South Sudan. In each case, expectations of delivery by the United Nations in support of a peace agreement may not be matched by the capacity of the Organization to influence the process which leads to it. I note and support the observations in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (A/70/95-S/2015/446) that "Whenever the United Nations has a peace operation on the ground, it should lead or play a leading role in political efforts prior to and during peace processes and after agreements are reached."

55. Where differences do exist, it is important to maintain dialogue and find ways to engage and address them in the best interests of a peaceful resolution of conflict. It is a common duty to deepen the strategic dialogue between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations and key regional States to narrow divergences and assist in forging common approaches to crises, especially given the fact that the repercussions tend to go far beyond the region itself. Undertaking joint assessments and analysis will assist in the development of early interventions. That does not automatically mean that there will be a consensus on the best response, but a more institutionalized exchange will help to identify the rationale for any differences and allow for the different organizations to play to their strengths.

56. I also take note of the increased level of consultations between the Security Council and other decision-making bodies of regional and subregional organizations. One example of that is the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, as evidenced by the fact that the two bodies have held annual joint consultative meetings for the past nine years. In addition to regular briefings from United Nations envoys, the Security Council has also employed a flexible format of "informal interactive dialogues", to engage directly with the leadership of the African Union, including on Guinea-Bissau, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan.

57. In addition to coordinating engagement, it is also important to coordinate the application of leverage, including sanctions. In almost all conflict situations in which the Security Council has imposed sanctions, they have been put in place to support peace processes led or supported by the United Nations and used to target spoilers. In a few cases, secondary sanctions have been adopted to support peace processes in another country. Targeted measures against individuals and entities have acted as leverage in support of the efforts of the mediators. Beyond the peace process itself, they have also been used to provide further support to the implementation of peace agreements and longer-term peacebuilding efforts.

VII. Cooperation on prevention

58. Mediation and good offices are tools; prevention is a goal, which it is increasingly recognized those tools can promote. Cooperation on mediation and good offices between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations shows particular promise in the field of prevention. Collectively, we are at our most

effective when we get our cooperation on prevention right, sending a strong and united political message by engaging early to forestall a crisis. The European Union and United Nations, for instance, have undertaken combined conflict analysis to explore the possibility of joint preventative action, including common messaging to amplify messages and send a stronger political signal.

59. The early-warning mission that UNOWA and ECOWAS undertook in April 2014 in Burkina Faso and the swift joint reaction of the United Nations, the African Union and ECOWAS, following the popular uprising that led to the departure of former President Blaise Compaoré in October 2014, calmed tensions and prevented further destabilization at that juncture. The current crisis illustrates, however, the need for longer-term investment in prevention to maintain such engagements. In the Great Lakes region, following the crisis in Burundi in April 2015, the United Nations continues to work closely with the East African Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to de-escalate tensions and promote political dialogue.

60. An important aspect of prevention is strengthening national capacities and engaging at the national level in support of local dispute resolution mechanisms to build social cohesion and national resilience. In the Sahel, my Special Envoy has been collaborating closely with the African Union representatives in the region and with ECOWAS, ECCAS and the European Union, in order to build and sustain political will in the areas of governance, security and resilience. Both UNOCA and UNOWA are providing support to the Lake Chad Basin Commission as it strives to address the regional impact of the Boko Haram crisis.

61. Since 2012, the UNDP has worked closely with the European Union to support the development of "insider mediation" capacities in 14 countries around the world. Focusing on internal conflict management processes, including dialogue and negotiation, the partnership has contributed to national platforms for mediation and dialogue in the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Ghana, supported the engagement of civil society, including youth and women organizations, in Chad, Maldives and Togo, and enhanced the inclusivity of national dialogue and mediation processes in Guyana, Mauritania, Nepal and Yemen. In many instances, country-level engagements have been reinforced through the deployment of peace and development advisers under the auspices of UNDP and the Department of Political Affairs. The recent publication of the guidance note on supporting insider mediation, developed jointly by the European Union and the United Nations, is the first step in documenting and distilling best practices.[3]

62. The United Nations continues to play a key role in fostering cross-regional collaboration, capacity-building, the sharing of best practices and addressing the potential gaps in the geographic scope of the membership of organizations which could be exploited by violent extremist groups. In Southern and Central Africa and in Central Asia, the United Nations is cooperating with relevant regional organizations to support Member States in adopting and implementing regional preventive counter-terrorism strategies and addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. Later this year, I will present a plan of action to prevent violent extremism, which will include recommendations for further strategic action and tools at the regional level to address the drivers of violent extremism that often span regions and subregions.

[3] See UNDP, "Supporting insider mediation: strengthening resilience to conflict and turbulence" (2014).

63. Recently, UNEP and the Department of Political Affairs have also collaborated on the issuance of new guidelines for mediating conflicts over natural resources, helping to strengthen conflict prevention by identifying paths towards resolution through mediation and third-party involvement.[4] Focusing on extractive resources, land and water, the guide can be used by different stakeholders and natural resource management experts considering a mediated solution to a dispute over natural resources, including regional and subregional organizations, and will be made available to the members of the "Mediation in the Mediterranean" initiative as they plan a meeting on this subject in Amman later in 2015.

VIII. Cooperation on women and peace and security

64. As we approach the fifteenth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), we have an obligation to ensure the equal and effective participation of women in mediation processes and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Significant efforts have been made to ensure that the peacemaking work of the United Nations is more inclusive, including by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).[5] Expert gender advice is now increasingly incorporated into peace processes and a growing number of peace agreements include gender-relevant provisions. However, much more needs to be done to close the gap between the robust normative framework for the advancement of women and peace and security, and the practice on the ground.

65. The series of eight high-level seminars on gender and inclusive mediation processes organized by the Department of Political Affairs involved 168 envoys, senior mediators and mediation experts, including 30 senior officials from 11 regional and subregional organizations. They were introduced to practical mediation strategies and tools for more inclusive conflict analysis and the design of peace processes, including gender-relevant provisions in the different thematic areas of peace agreements.

66. The United Nations continues to partner with regional and subregional organizations to promote and strengthen national capacities for mediation to enable more effective participation of women at all levels of peacemaking. In 2011 and 2012, UNOWA in collaboration with UN-Women and ECOWAS, trained 32 women leaders from governmental and civil society organizations in 16 West African countries in conflict mediation. A number of those newly trained mediators are now participating in peace processes supported by ECOWAS. UN-Women, UNOWA and ECOWAS are currently developing a similar programme to be implemented in 2016 at community level in those 16 countries.

67. UN-Women has partnered with regional and subregional organizations to increase the availability and quality of gender expertise in mediation processes and support greater and more effective participation by women. In 2015 UN-Women, the African Union and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa convened a regional workshop bringing together 35 participants from Member States, subregional organizations and civil society, to address women's

[4] See United Nations Department of Political Affairs and UNEP, "Natural resources and conflict: a guide for mediation practitioners" (2015).

[5] See A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1, section I, resolution 1, annexes.

underrepresentation in mediation processes, work on their strategic inclusion and build a network of core women mediators on the continent.

68. Regional organizations are taking steps to increase the numbers of women involved in mediation efforts and in representative roles in their ranks. In 2014, the African Union appointed a Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security. UN-Women is supporting the recruitment of a senior gender adviser to the IGAD mediation team for the South Sudan peace process to enhance women's direct representation in the talks and strengthen South Sudanese women's solidarity and capacity to engage fully and equally in the negotiation process.

IX. Conclusions and recommendations

69. Most conflicts end at the negotiating table, not on the battlefield. Mediating political solutions — getting parties to the table, reaching an agreement and supporting the implementation of that agreement — requires political will, collaboration and unity of purpose at all levels. I have made strengthening the ability of the United Nations to lead and support mediation processes one of the priorities of my tenure.

70. Mediation has proven to be an effective tool in the peaceful settlement of disputes, yet it remains sorely under-resourced. The efforts of both the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations continue to be hampered by insufficient and unpredictable funding. There is an overarching need for greater investment to professionalize mediation capabilities and strengthen the capacity to engage early and effectively and sustain that engagement throughout a mediation process.

71. In its resolution 68/303, the General Assembly requested that I recommend how cooperation with regional and subregional organizations on mediation could be enhanced. I would like to highlight some broad areas for consideration.

72. **Institutionalize early United Nations engagement with partners**. Engagement between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in early warnings and conflict analysis throughout the conflict cycle allows for a better common understanding of the root causes and drivers of conflict, helping to diffuse any potential inter-organizational tensions and facilitating a more coordinated approach to conflict prevention, preventative diplomacy and mediation based on comparative advantage and complementarity.

73. **Strengthen regional offices and presences of the Department of Political Affairs**. The development of the regional offices of the Department of Political Affairs has enhanced the agility and effectiveness of preventive good offices undertaken by the United Nations. It has deepened mediation partnerships with regional and subregional organizations, as well as with Members States and national actors. The regional offices and presences remain an effective tool for gaining consent to conflict prevention and mediation efforts and for working with regional and subregional partners. I look forward to making further recommendations in that regard in my forthcoming response to the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Operations.

74. **Increase support to Resident Coordinators and United Nations country teams**. Demands on Resident Coordinators to assist national actors in conflict

prevention approaches are likely to rise. In carrying out their work, the Department of Political Affairs and UNDP should continue to support them through a number of tools, including the establishment of platforms capable of rapidly deploying expertise to the field, targeted training, support from regional offices and the deployment of peace and development advisers. As acknowledged in the report of the High-level Independent Panel, that will require reliable resources through the regular budget as part of the core prevention and mediation capacities of the Secretariat.

75. **Enhance and institutionalize interaction and consultations on mediation initiatives**. The present report highlights various initiatives linking the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations at all levels. Work must continue to develop more institutionalized mechanisms for consultations and collaboration, including joint assessment missions, conflict analysis and planning and high-level dialogue, as well as the development of groups of friends, contact groups and donor support mechanisms in specific settings, as appropriate. The more routine our interactions, the more we will institutionalize common frameworks for analysis and response. Efforts to strengthen dialogue between secretariats can be mirrored by similar consultations at the political level between Member States, the Security Council and the decision-making bodies of regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union Peace and Security Council, as appropriate.

76. **Undertake joint "lessons learned" reflections and knowledge management**. During a mediation initiative or after one, it is important to take the time to reflect on what has worked well and what requires adjustment. The present report highlights the need to engage according to our comparative strengths. By examining initiatives together and undertaking reflections on joint lessons learned, we would be better placed to make that kind of assessment, understand different institutional strengths and challenges, draw lessons from experience, and plan future collaborations accordingly. The practice of building that knowledge together and institutionalizing the lessons would strengthen our partnerships and help build knowledge capacity in mediation in our respective organizations.

77. **Continue to develop mediation frameworks and guidance**. A shared conflict analysis is an important element in generating coherent strategies, but it is also important to have a common understanding of the range of tools, techniques and approaches available to mediators and their teams. That highlights the need to build on the Guidance for Effective Mediation and develop specific guidance, in consultation with regional and subregional organizations and other partners, on issues ranging from substantive areas, such as ceasefires and other security arrangements, to methodology issues, such as how to design inclusive processes better, incorporating women and marginalized groups. The intention is not to limit the room for manoeuvre of mediators or be prescriptive but to capture best practices and the range of different options to help in calibrating and designing a mediation strategy for today's increasingly complex environments.

78. **Professionalize the cadre of mediation actors**. Developing the expertise of envoys and mediation teams continues to be a priority. That includes identifying the future generation of mediators and building their capacity via coaching, training and deployments, with a particular focus on increasing the number of women engaged as envoys and senior advisers. The cross-fertilization of expertise between the United

Nations and regional and subregional organizations, including sharing rosters and exchanges between staff, will strengthen expertise and reinforce collaboration. Joint training on mediation skills and substantive areas, including on guidance material and best practices, will enhance knowledge and help to develop a more shared and structured approach to supporting peace processes. Joint work at the outset, during or after mediation is difficult to sustain without standing, well-resourced capacities. The possibilities for setting up a system for mentoring mid-level mediators, and women in particular, who have the potential to occupy senior positions, should be explored by the relevant organizations.

79. **Support national capacities**. It is important that mediation initiatives are conceptualized and designed on the basis of long-term and sustained support, including through the implementation phase. Ultimately, however, a critical determining factor for the success of prevention and mediation initiatives will be the resilience of communities and the ability of institutions at both the local and national level, including "insider mediators", to respond to crises and resolve conflicts. At the country level, United Nations country teams are engaged in implementing confidence-building measures to build the capacity for open dialogue and building trust between communities, which can serve as a foundation upon which mediation can be built. Working with Member States to strengthen those capacities is an important area for increased collaboration between the United Nations, drawing on the expertise of the Department of Political Affairs, and UNDP and regional and subregional organizations.

80. **Achieve better synergy between mediation efforts and United Nations sanctions**. Further work needs to be undertaken to improve systematic coordination between the Security Council, the sanctions committees, sanctions expert panels and mediators, including in those cases where mediation efforts are led by regional or subregional actors. While some level of cooperation already exists among those actors, there is scope for additional engagement.